Corporate Social Responsibility: Changing Lives through Sports

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Summary Report

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Background

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a significant concept in the arena of business across India as well as around the globe. It is becoming an important constituent of the mainstream corporate agenda. The growing importance of CSR has rewritten the relationship of business not just with shareholders, but also with other stakeholders including employees, supply chain partners, government, creditors, customers and communities. Engaging in CSR is thus a desired investment in the 21st century knowledge economy to further the development process for a sustainable future. And sport is an important factor in this paradigm.

Whilst pure sports sponsorship is often a hard-nosed marketing and business decision, any CSR intervention is based more on how a business can improve the communities in which it operates. In addition to being an effective CSR medium, sport builds values that any socially-responsible business strives for and instils qualities like team work and fair play. Moreover, it involves employees and suppliers, as well as building good community relations.

There are many examples of how businesses around the world use sport to fulfil their CSR objectives. Clearly, given its convening power, visibility and potentially high ROI, sport is perceived to add value to the sponsor, while spotlighting individual sports. At the same time, with the right inputs, sport is increasingly being used to help change people’s lives at local, national and international levels.

Although sport for development is still at a nascent stage in India, a growing number of organisations have begun to implement CSR initiatives that employ sport as a means for development and the development impact and outcomes achievable will be better understood in due course.

Introduction

The purpose of the Conference was to provide an opportunity for organisations with active CSR programmes to discuss and learn about the value that sport can bring to society. The Conference highlighted the accelerated pace that a sport for development approach offers to development projects, rapidly fostering the creation of communities which are healthy, active and behave responsibly. It further emphasized the bond which sport can create between organisations and the communities they work for, by enhancing community connections and helping to cement a sense of institutional belonging.

In order to explore those areas where CSR through sports can add value to corporate branding and shape strategies to integrate them, the Conference platform brought together those who already support sport for development programmes and those who are otherwise active on the CSR front. The idea was to highlight the value of sports as a CSR activity which contributes to nation building and, accordingly, the discussions centred around sport as a transformational tool to improve lives.
Inaugural Session

The Conference started with the opening remarks of Paresh Tewary, Director, FICCI Aditya Birla CSR Centre for Excellence. He formally welcomed all the participants and explained the need and purpose of holding the conference. He highlighted the status of underprivileged children in India and expressed concern of the shortage of open spaces and playfields especially in urban India. India has the youngest population and participation in sport is indeed the key for the overall development of children and for this it is equally important to create and maintain enough spaces for play and sport activities. He therefore urged corporate representatives present to join hands to promote the development of children and youth through the medium of sports.

Rob Lynes, Director, British Council, India emphasized, in his key note address, the inclusive nature of sports and its potential to reach out to everyone. Highlighting the engaging, simple and yet effective spirit of sports to engage multiple stakeholders, he stressed the importance of sports and physical education in the lives of individuals, while describing the British Council’s Youth Sport Leadership programme and its role in the development of the Central Board of Physical Education (CBSE) ’s Physical Education Cards (PEC).
Concluding the session, Mathew Spacie, Founder and CEO of Magic Bus, welcomed all guests and participants to the conference and thanked them for coming. He said that it was a matter of pride and privilege to have brought such eminent personalities from the corporate world together with national and International NGOs on the same platform to discuss sport for development as a CSR avenue. Talking about how Magic Bus came into existence, he discussed the imperative need for corporate engagement in the development sector and the ease with which children and youth could be actively involved in development programmes through the medium of sport. Illustrating the Magic Bus experience in both urban and rural environments, he mentioned that female participation in sport had increased from an initial 5 to 10 per cent to 40 per cent within a year of Magic Bus’ intervention, while school enrolment had spiralled, on average, from less than 60 per cent to over 90 per cent amongst children enrolled in Magic Bus programmes. He hoped the Conference would serve to catalyse a process to change the prevailing public mindset – which considers sport a relatively frivolous activity – and give sport and physical education the importance it merits in the holistic development of children and youth, through increased corporate ownership of sport for development interventions.
Kapil Dev, former Captain, Indian Cricket Team:

Kapil Dev strongly expressed that sport has the power to change the world and bring people together. Lamenting the neglected status of sports in India he said, “Sports are ‘by the way’ in India, except on the rare occasions when one of our champions wins something, when it suddenly becomes a matter of national pride”. He noted that attitudes toward sport were changing, illustrating this by mentioning that when television broadcasting commenced in India, only one hour per week was dedicated to sports on the national channel, Doordarshan. He compared this to the present scenario, with as many as five, dedicated sports channels running concurrently, offering a wide range of sports to a vastly increased viewership.

He said pointing to Jagbir Singh and Viren Rasquinha, the hockey champions, “we are emotional people and have been in sport simply because of our passion; you represent Indian corporates and you do business – it is indeed wonderful to see that corporates have started to find time to discuss the development of sport in India. This never used to happen a few years ago.” He expressed his delight at the participation of so many eminent
corporate houses in a discussion on enhancing participation in sport as a means to support social
development and hoped this would provide the impetus to bring sport into the lives of millions of
underprivileged Indian children and youth. He mentioned that his organisation also happens to be a
beneficiary of Laureus funds where he met Matthew and was really impressed to know of what Magic
Bus does and how it influences the lives of thousands of children through sport.

Jagbir Singh, former India player and Olympian, Hockey

Jagbir Singh, commenting on the status of sports, with reference
to his experience as a hockey Olympian, pointed out the dearth
of contemporary infrastructure and technical support for
athletes and the dire need for upgraded coaching and training
skills if India is to deliver to potential in the global sporting arena.
He expressed the hope that increased corporate support to the
sports sector would help other sports to elevate their standards
and visibility and emulate the organisational and commercial
success demonstrated by cricket.
Session 1: Introduction to Sport and Development: Sport as a catalyst for Social Change

Moderator: Vivek Joshi, CSR Advisor, GAIL

Panellists:

1) Injeti Srinivas, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, GoI (Could not attend the conference)
2) Swaran Singh Chhabra, Sports Development Advisor, Commonwealth Secretariat
3) Sophie Beauvais, Director, International Relations, Australian Sports Commission
4) Franz Gastler, Executive Director, YUWA

Highlights: The session highlighted the tremendous benefits of sport for those who participate regularly: from fitness and improved health to leadership skills, increased aspirations, enhanced self-esteem, team spirit, etc. In addition to the direct benefits of participating in organised physical activity, the discussion brought out the social value being placed on sport by governments, when used as a medium to improve the lives of marginalized or traumatized children and youth and as an effective tool to help build inclusive communities and address development issues. An NGO perspective illustrated the remarkably cost-effective development outcomes being achieved through organised sport - this visually appealing and popular medium - by adopting a gentle, yet highly-involving and persistent mentoring approach to changing lives, especially for at-risk children and youth in marginalized, grass root communities.
Swaran Singh Chhabra, Sports Development Advisor, Commonwealth Secretariat, in his presentation talked about underprivileged children playing football in a team and the remarkable team spirit and leadership skills such children possess. He said it had been amply demonstrated that sport has the potential to help develop individuals and communities. He cited instances of how sports are used to improve lives of girls and women and combat developmental issues such as teenage pregnancy and HIV/AIDS prevention in developing regions such as Kenya, Ghana, Oceania and the Caribbean Islands. In developed countries like USA and Australia sports are used as an effective medium to combat crime, delinquent behavior and drug abuse amongst youth.

He emphasized the need to develop high quality sports programmes that ensure hundred per cent participation and foster the development of physical and sporting skills. In his concluding remarks he said that while sport was necessary for wholesome development and good health, grass roots and community sport programmes should necessarily be linked with development initiatives in sectors such as health and education, to maximise their impact.

Sophie Beauvais, Director, International Relations, Australian Sports Commission, stressed that Sport is a non-threatening, cost efficient, high profile vehicle that brings people together by generating excitement and interest from different community sections. She laid emphasis on the formation of mutually beneficial partnerships between organisations whose goals and values are aligned and complement each other and the creation of opportunities to enrich and enhance relationships with the communities they are bound to. She stressed that only partnerships based on equity and transparency can lead to the development of mutual respect, trust and commitment, which are prerequisites for the sustainability of any development activity. In India through the Australian Sports Outreach Programme (ASOP) they work through six partners. The Australian Sports Commission is helping and adding to the capacity of these organisations enabling them to reach to more number of children and youth with the help of their Sport for development programmes.
Franz Gastler, Executive Director, YUWA, through his emotive video, highlighted the powerful impact of YUWA, the sport for development programme he has been running in Jharkhand over the past two and a half years. He emphasised the need to moderate the pace of sport for development interventions and build activities up at a gradual pace. His operations have been running on a tiny budget and stunning results have already been achieved through a team of handpicked community volunteer coaches whom he has been training to coach and deliver sporting skills to young girls. Franz was emphatic about the value of volunteerism to ensure long-term programme sustainability. He said, “playing or coaching in the United States has just nothing in common to what I do in Hutup and other villages of Jharkhand where I work. Here I deal with an altogether different set of people, a different environment.” He cited an example that he had to argue with a father that the difference between two of his daughters could not have been 6months! He tried to highlight saying, ‘when you are working in such environments you have to go SLOW. Hiring professional coaches and training kids is not the right approach, you have to first connect with the people, the community there and this takes time.”

The audience put forward several questions; they were eager to know the Commonwealth Secretariat’s plans for promoting Sports for Development to which Mr Chhabra responded that though the Secretariat does not fund programmes directly but advocates it on various government platforms. Several questions were directed to Franz who had actually managed to stimulate people’s thought process as to how Sport for development works on the ground. Vivek Joshi made the closing remarks for the session thanking all panellists and the audience for their overwhelming response and interest to know more.
Session 2: Sports and CSR: The Social Case for Sport

Moderator: Novy Kapadia, Football Analyst and Commentator

Panellists:

1. Tarun Puri, Managing Director, Nike India
2. Kirk Harrison, Head, Barclays Spaces for Sport
3. Dinesh Agarwal, Head NTPC Foundation, GM CSR NTPC
4. Kishore Taid, Director, Baichung Bhutia Football Schools
5. Satendra Bajwa, Founder, Khelshala
6.

Highlights:

A somewhat tarnished ‘commercial’ image has been attached to professional sporting events, which tends to overshadow the potential benefits and power of sport as a catalyst for social development. Sports programmes can actually offer a bridge across socio-economic gaps and can be designed to contribute to improving the quality of individual lives, while enhancing community ‘togetherness’ and aspirations and serving as a catalyst for social and economic progress. Corporate entities with active CSR programs need to only add sport for development elements to their existing programmes to accelerate and enhance the impact of such programmes.
Tarun Puri, Managing Director, Nike India talked about the manifold benefits of creating access for children and youth to sport. He also stressed the importance of connecting with kids in different ways. Through a video clip, he shared the experience of Nike’s SOWETO project in South Africa, which provides life skills training and HIV awareness to kids through sport and has reached out to nearly 20,000 kids. He also discussed the Bola pre Frente, programme of Brazil which is being run in a gangster and crime-ridden location. The children there would join and run with these gangs after school hours until the mothers took the initiative to organise after school sporting activities for them. With their attention firmly focused on sports, the incidence of children joining the gangs has dropped significantly. In addition to sport, the programme promotes education and teaches life skills.

Kirk Harrison, Head, Barclays Spaces for Sport, elaborated on ‘The Social Case for Sport’ though the Barclays experience. He described how sport-based CSR activities can be effectively linked to business, while disseminating specific messages through these sports. He emphasised the value of sport as a platform to address social issues and foster development, highlighting the experiences Barclays has had in reducing crime in parts of the UK. The importance of partnership and local engagement in designing sport for development projects cannot be ignored. Given the urban premium on land, the key lies in creating smaller spaces for appropriately adapted sports, such as street cricket.

Operationally, he advised the need to link projects to the business and put corporate expertise into practice. For example, Barclays being a bank, helps people learn to deal with their money in a better way, helping them to open accounts, take advantage of microfinance schemes and use ATM facilities. He stressed the importance of professionalism and the need to take beneficiaries seriously, while demanding high standards from the staff involved and ensuring adequate internal support. Moreover, it was important to demonstrate impact and disseminate results, based on good M & E processes, documentation and reporting.
Dinesh Agarwal, Head, NTPC Foundation and GM CSR NTPC, said that NTPC had a dedicated budget for CSR within which there is specific allocation for rural sports. He stressed the importance and value of relationship development between corporates and their constituent or dependent communities and the need for local communities to feel a tangible sense of belongingness to the company. He said that sport provides a platform which encourages community involvement and breaks down social hierarchies, provided there is adequate focus on local needs and issues.

Kishore Taid, Director, Baichung Bhutia Football Schools, conveyed apologies on behalf of Bhaichung Bhutia for his absence. Touching upon his own experiences as a professional footballer, he said skill was not confined only to those born with talent, but could be developed, through good coaching, in those with a genuine passion for sport. He was also convinced that sport could inculcate good value systems in people and shared the story of Lalit, a boy whose keen interest in football was spotted by the foundation. Today Lalit has developed into an exceptional leader and returned to train slum children in his community. In conclusion, he said, “Whoever wants to play can come. We will make them play. Skill is not an issue for entry – only a zeal for sport.”

Satendra Bajwa, Founder, Khelshala, touched upon his own experiences as a squash player and international coach, which led him to return to India and set up Khelshala, which uses squash coaching as a means to promote the development of youngsters. He confessed that it had been a struggle to raise funds for his programme, which had been financed largely by himself and his friends, because it was difficult to make the necessary connections with the corporate world and match their agenda. He said that the changes he had noticed in
underprivileged children was remarkable and this led to his conviction that sports can actually bring about positive behaviour change in children coming from the most disturbed sections of society. He felt that there was an imperative need to create awareness amongst parents regarding the role that sports can play in shaping the personality of kids.

Novy made the closing remarks for the session saying that corporate involvement is very much needed and till the hard work is not done at the grassroots the way Yuwa, Khelshala and Magic Bus are doing in various parts of India. He also complimented Baichung Bhutia Football Schools initiative saying, “this is probably the first time an Indian football player is working towards giving something back to the society trying to promote the sport.”
Session 3: Growth and Employability in the Sports sector – An opportunity for brand building

Moderator: Vivek Ramchandani, Coordinator, Australian Sports Outreach Program (ASOP), India

Panelists:

1. Rahul Verghese, Founder and CEO – Running and Living Infotainment
2. Prerana Langa, VP, ICICI Foundation for Inclusive Growth
3. Pooran Pandey, Director, Times Foundation
4. Hakimuddin Habibulla, Founding Trustee, GoSports Foundation
5. Viren Rasquinha, COO, Olympic Gold Quest

Highlights:

This session considered the benefits of sport on employability and performance and its potential impact on the enhancement of livelihoods in the Indian context. Regular participation in sport gives the individual exposure to practical life experiences in a controlled environment and contributes indirectly to raised self-esteem and better social and life skills. Sport, by itself, helps to build the capacity for leadership and contributes to the development of decision making and communication skills, organizing skills and team work; and sporting success at any level never fails to result in the enhancement of personal aspirations. Sport related initiatives also have a positive impact on organisational dynamics and work place communities, creating synergy and a healthy work environment, while contributing tangibly to training and skills development at all organisational levels. Finally, corporate involvement in sport helps build organisational and brand loyalty and strengthens staff motivation, leading to lower personnel turnover and better community links.

Rahul Verghese, Founder and CEO – Running and Living Infotainment, shared his vision of enabling brands, organisations and individuals to unleash their potential through organised run events, which enable individuals to realize their dreams, build health, self confidence and develop a positive attitude. He recounted his own transition from a corporate person to the cash-strapped promoter of a sport and development programme and the challenges he encountered when he presented his product to corporate entities seated on the other side of the table.
Prerna Langa, VP, ICICI Foundation for Inclusive Growth expressed her conviction that sports could be strategically used when it came to CSR. What she had learned at this conference had opened up her mind to the enormous potential the sport for development approach carries. Her organisation already had a strong CSR programme and she was now keen on adding sport for development to the corporate CSR agenda. In conclusion, she thanked the organizers for inviting her to the conference and exposing her to this exciting CSR avenue.

Pooran Pandey, Director, Times Foundation stressed the importance of CSR in promoting a sports culture in India. He said, CSR bridges the corporate mandate of caring for society, business and environment. He said that sports did form a part of the CSR mandate of several corporates but with better structuring there was enormous scope to do much more, particularly given the government’s new focus on the need for greater corporate commitment to CSR.

Hakimuddin Habibulla, Founding Trustee, GoSports Foundation talked about the support he had received from BSF when he went to swim for India at the Sydney Olympics and raised the issue of including paralympic sports within the corporate CSR agenda to make the space truly inclusive. He screened a brief film clip showing the medal winning performance of an Indian swimmer with a physical disability and subsequently lamented the fact that despite his memorable performance, this remarkable swimmer was presently languishing without employment. He urged the corporate representatives present to look seriously at inclusion beyond the usual CSR angles.
Viren Rasquinha, COO, Olympic Gold Quest referred to his experience in the management of the Olympic Gold Quest foundation. As a former Indian hockey captain, he cited his organization as an example of how the sports sector can provide employment to former athletes who develop the skills to train elite sports persons to reach their highest potential. He mentioned the luminaries who had got together to establish OGQ with the specific intention of training elite athletes to attain international levels and contributing to the cause of bringing medal glory to India. He was convinced that plenty of corporate funding was available for the promotion of sports, provided the promoters of such projects presented corporate sponsors with viable, result-oriented proposals carrying measurable social and developmental impact and well defined project management systems.
Concluding Remarks

In his summing up, Vivek Ramchandani reminded the gathering that the long-term goal and focus of this conference was to encourage investment in CSR initiatives which promote grass roots sport as a means for individual, social and community development. It was important to distinguish between corporate funding of sport for development, which is a CSR activity with a social return, as against corporate sponsoring of elite sport, usually a brand building business proposition with a commercial return.

He drew attention to the joy all young children experience through vigorous physical activity when playing and urged those present to consider defending the child’s right to play, by investing in projects designed to enhance children’s participation in well-organised, inclusive sport and physical education. “Remember,” he said, “Less than 10 per cent of over 550 million Indian children and youth have the luxury of regular access to organised sport.”

In order for any meaningful sport for development activity to take place, children’s regular participation is necessary. Community coaches must be able to plan age appropriate sports activities to make each child’s sporting experience positive, inclusive and fun, whatever his/her talent and skill level may be.

Referring to the government’s Panchayat Yuva Khel aur Krida Abhiyan (PYKKA), a massive rural grass roots sport development mission, with a 10-year budget exceeding Rs. 5,000 crores and a focus on ‘sport for all’, he said CSR projects should take cognisance of the funding available to village panchayats under the PYKKA scheme and endeavour to develop complementary sport for development project models to ensure sustainability. Given the government’s commitment to grass roots sports, this was a good time for the corporate sector to contribute by investing in the development of viable sport based CSR interventions and replicable project models.

He mentioned that in a school if you notice that while majority of kids will be engaged in play activities during the Games period, you will notice one fat child with spectacles sitting at some corner. Sport for
development is all about INCLUDING that child too and let him get the benefits of sport from both health point of view as well as developing his/her personal skills.

To take things forward, he invited the organisers to compile and share contact information for all those present, together with a report on conference proceedings. He encouraged interested parties to initiate discussions with each other and join hands to use sport as a means for development. With CSR funding increasing exponentially, Indian NGOs are sure to find corporate support for well-designed sport for development projects.

**Vote of Thanks**

The day ended with a heartfelt vote of thanks by Matthew Spacie. He thanked FICCI Aditya Birla CSR Centre for Excellence, the British Council, the ASC for their support and all the moderators, panellists and participants for their interest and active participation in the discussion and expressed his hope that the Conference had achieved its objective of demystifying the concept of sport for development and peace for the benefit of the Indian business community.